

Democracy R&D Network



What is it?

One of Democracy R&D's main claims to its goal of "improving democracy through the use of random selection and deliberation" is by facilitating collaborative learning opportunities among its network members.

Who is it by and for?

At the time of writing, 154 organizations participated in the network, spread throughout 46 countries and 6 continents. Network members range from practitioners to scholars, advocates, and civil servants who work in the field of sortition-based deliberative democracy. Although still a minority, there is a relevant representation of Global South organizations in the network. In its Network Development Project, 83% of respondents manifested a preference for prioritizing the recruitment of new members from marginalized backgrounds.

Implications for mutual learning

Practices carried out in the network shed light on opportunities for mutual learning between its members.

Learning calls and regional workshops

Learning calls are a key network activity, providing the space for shared learning on key cases, methods, and practices, including exploration of successes, challenges, and failures. Today, they are organized on an ad hoc, albeit quite frequent, basis, with network members either volunteering or being invited by other network members or its lead to present a topic. Learning calls are usually offered at two alternative hours to allow for people in different time zones to take part.

The network is divided into regional groupings: There is one for Latin America and one for Central and Eastern Europe. On monthly Zoom meetings, members share updates on what they have been doing, request assistance or input on specific topics, and propose regionally relevant discussions. Regional groupings allow for regional integration and mutual learning, and they can give rise to regional projects, as is the case with the Latin American Climate Assemblies project, further discussed as a separate Case Study below.

Annual meetings

Democracy R&D has held network-wide in-person gatherings once a year since its inception. They are usually structured over 2-3 days and involve panels, workshops, and informal gatherings. Current points of discussion within the field of deliberative democracy are debated, and practitioners throughout the world are encouraged to present interesting learning topics from their experience.



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A geographical imbalance in these gatherings has been noted, with disproportionate Global North attendance. One of the ways conference organizers have gone about addressing this issue is by financially supporting attendance costs on need-based criteria. Global South members have seized the opportunity of these meetings to draw attention to deliberative democracy occurring outside of traditional centers, and to how the network can support interested parties in the Global South to better conduct their deliberative work, such as providing stipends.

The annual conference is regarded by members as playing a critical role in the relationships of trust and resulting collaborations across the network. It is a pivotal moment to create awareness about decentralized initiatives regarding deliberative democracy and to enable connections that will result in mutual-learning oriented collaborations throughout the year.

Informal interactions in the network

Democracy R&D's website hosts a particularly active forum, in which members disclose updates about their projects, request suggestions for sources, benchmarks, or professionals, and also propose discussions about controversial or difficult issues.

In addition to the more structured format of learning calls, discussed above, individual members can propose virtual meetings to brainstorm about a particular topic to which they are new and about which other network members have more expertise, for example. These have proved to be not only productive but a symbol of the generosity that is still prevalent within the network, by which members share their experience, knowledge, and even proprietary material, such as budget information, communications templates, etc. to assist in the development of decentralized initiatives of deliberative democracy throughout the world.

Knowledge production

Knowledge production in the network represents an obstacle to enhanced mutual learning. Network members usually engage in activities without compensation. The absence of paid staff means there is frequently no documentation of instances of collective knowledge creation.

Should Democracy R&D be successful in boosting its Global South membership, institutionalizing a South-North learning mindset, and better organizing the knowledge production that occurs within its reach, it will position itself as a unique space for testing and establishing South-North learning practices.

